



IEP

Goals Made Easy

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Stephen

To: Danielle

Alex Steph

6/15

Assoc IN.

IEP Goals Made Easy

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ISBN-13 978-0-9910797-3-5

ISBN-10 0991079736

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"Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream, which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation."

~John F. Kennedy

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Mr. John Tully, Retired Director of Pupil Services for Marlboro, MA. Meritoriously, he served in this position for over 20 years. We thank you for always putting the student's needs first.

1 INTRODUCTION/WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)?

*“A child is one of our greatest blessings. To love and guide that child is our
greatest service.”*
~Claudia Moss

Our wish is that you find this work helpful, easy to understand, user-friendly and inspiring. Yes, there will be people who stand on the outside gazing in, and they may possess the opinion that it is an unfortunate fate for any parent who must seek Special Needs services for his child. Our stance is wholly different. Parents blessed to nurture a child is a sacred matter, and if that child should require Special Needs services, the parent and the child are doubly blessed to be able to successfully navigate the process. All children are precious, and all should be provided the opportunity to learn and excel in learning conditions that best serve their learning needs.

This book is our effort to support and serve you and all Special Needs scholars. In these pages, when we reference the Special Needs student with the pronoun “he,” we are referring universally to girls and boys.

In addition, we will use Deaf as an example of a student’s Special Needs service, but the reference can be applied to any Special Needs service.

WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)?

“Education is the most powerful tool which you can use to change the world.”
~Nelson Mandela

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document that details the Special Needs services for students, so that they can access the school curriculum. The IEP includes any modifications that are required in the classroom and any additional special programs or services. In the USA, an IEP is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). The IEP addresses your child’s educational needs and contains specific, measurable, short term, and annual goals for each of those needs, up to the point of high school graduation, or prior to the student’s twenty-second birthday. The “I” in IEP represents the individual; therefore, each child has his own unique IEP.

The written IEP statement is developed by your child’s teachers, and it is reviewed and agreed upon by your child’s Special Needs, education funding organization and you, the parents. The IEP describes the measurable goals the team sets for your child during the school year, as well as any special support needed to help your child achieve his or her educational goals. The IEP evaluation process

helps teachers and related service providers understand the student's disability and how the disability affects the learning process.

2 WHO COMPRISES THE IEP TEAM?

“The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn ... and change.”

~Carl Rogers

The IEP team consists of a Special Needs student’s parents and school personnel, which comprises teachers, department supervisors, principals, director, and any related service providers. There are 3 principal parts of the IEP team: parents, school, and Special Needs Office. The Special Needs Office is located in your child’s school district. You are considered to be a full and equal member of the IEP team, along with school personnel and the Special Needs Office staff. Therefore, you should expect to be treated as an equal participant in developing your child’s IEP.

You are a crucial member of the team because you have unique knowledge of your child’s strengths and needs. You have the right to be involved in meetings to discuss the identification, evaluation, IEP development, and educational placement for your children. You also have the right to ask questions, dispute points, and request modifications to the plan, as do all members of the IEP team.

You or school personnel may also invite other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding your child. For

example, school personnel may invite related service providers such as speech and occupational therapists. You may invite professionals who have worked with or assessed your child and who possess important information for the IEP team. These professionals may be your child's psychologist, doctor, tutor or someone who can assist you in advocating for your child's needs, such as an educational advocate, social worker or lawyer knowledgeable in the IEP process.

By law, you are eligible to receive an obligated proposal for services from your child's school district. If agreement on the proposal cannot be reached, the school district cannot delay in providing the services that it believes are the best services to ensure that your student receives an effective, educational program.

Please join our community at www.deafparenting.com for more information and discussions with other parents.

3 WHAT ARE THE 6 STAGES TO AN EFFECTIVE IEP FOR YOUR CHILD?

“Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or the same way.”

~George Evans

There are six stages in the IEP process. They are as follows: **Detection, Evaluation, Creation, Review, Renewal, and Completion.** To make the best decisions for your child and participate in the effective planning of his educational program, you should become very familiar with each stage.

The first stage is the **Detection** stage. Here in lies the discovery that your child requires Special Needs services to access the school curriculum. This stage can happen at birth, before preschool, in kindergarten, and up to a student’s high school graduation. As parents, you can make the discovery, in addition to caregivers, teachers, your child’s pediatrician, etc. For example, when you compare your child’s development with his siblings, you may notice that your child has difficulty doing some activities. Your child’s teacher may identify a particular challenge your child is experiencing, such as activities involving fine motor skills. Your child’s school may contact you, if your child is performing beneath the standard on a standardized test. For children from birth to preschool age, services are usually provided by your state’s early intervention services organizations.

Note: In some states, Pupil Services is the new name for Special

Needs services. Massachusetts uses the name; however, in this book, Pupil Services is synonymous with Special Needs services, which we will use.

When your child is identified as having a disability, your feelings are huge and can be incredibly overwhelming. Some of you are frightened, go into denial pretending it isn't happening, and must receive multiple referrals. You do not know what to do. For a quick moment, you wonder if your child will be able to live his best life. You realize that there is a hard road ahead, and you are not certain if your child will make it. You may be thinking, I cannot do it. That feeling is massive. As parents of Special Needs children, we know that feeling well, but we also know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. And gratefully, we know that IEPs help to get us there. Please remember: do not be afraid or ashamed to accept or to ask for help. Everyone is different, everyone is unique, and you must do everything you can to make sure your child can be the best he can be.

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The services your child needs are determined in the **Evaluation** stage. The Special Needs Office, personnel from your child's school and you, with invaluable parental input, are responsible for completing important assessments. As we mentioned previously, recommendations from other people who have worked with or completed testing for your child, such as, your child's doctor, school psychologists, and educators, are considered, also.

Creation is the third stage. The full IEP is composed here, usually for a year. It describes the services, denotes who will be providing them, and highlights where the services will be provided. The IEP's discussion-agreement session is one meeting in which all parties, your child's teachers, his school personnel, the Special Needs Office and you, the parents, discuss your child's IEP. If all parties are in accordance with the terms of the IEP, everyone signs the plan. Because of the large group of school personnel in attendance and the detailed paperwork involved, IEP meetings can be intimidating to parents.

Interim reviews are IEP progress reports addressed to you, the parents. They outline how well your child is doing with his IEP goals. In particular, the report details your child's progress for every goal listed in the IEP. It also provides a concise summary of your child's progress. Please be aware that your child's school is responsible for sending these progress reports. The interim reviews are communication opportunities mandated by law; they are scheduled about three or four times a year or as often as the regular school sends progress reports to parents. Changes to the full, annual IEP can be made in interim review meetings. As parents, you will be asked to review the reports and sign, if you agree.

Renewal of your child's IEP happens at the end of the school year. If the IEP team determines that your child still requires special services, a plan is developed for the next school year with the input of the Special Needs department, your child's school and you. For some students, retesting may be necessary to further assess their current needs to make modifications to the IEP. As with the initial IEP, there is an IEP team meeting to discuss and agree on next year's IEP, after which all parties sign the plan in agreement.

Finally, **Completion** of the IEP process happens when the Special Needs department, your child's school and you determine that your child no longer needs special services to access the school's curriculum. This resolution can happen anytime from preschool to high school graduation or when your child reaches age 22. For our son, Larry, completion happened at his high school graduation, because he is Deaf and needed services until graduation.

4 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS OFFICE IN THE IEP?

“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.”

~George Washington Carver

The Special Needs Office in the school district is responsible for receiving your child’s initial referral for Special Needs services, and determining whether your child has a Special Need through assessments, evaluations and your parental input. Sometimes the Special Needs Office works with other people who have tested your child, such as your child’s doctor, school psychologists, and educators.

The Special Needs Office completes observations, reviews past records, and works with you and anybody who participates in the evaluation process to determine whether your child qualifies for special education services. You, the parents, are a critical part of the team.

When the Special Needs Office decides your child is eligible for special education services, they work on developing an educational plan, which describes the services, denotes who will be providing them, and highlights where the services will be provided. This detailed, initial IEP is the basis for future annual IEPs. By law, it is the school system’s responsibility to help you locate an appropriate

facility.

For example, when our family moved to Marlboro, MA, we enrolled Larry at The Learning Center for the Deaf (TLC) in Framingham, MA. TLC worked with the Marlboro Special Needs Office for the initial IEP. Shortly after Larry began attending classes, a staff member from the Special Needs Office visited our home. She interviewed us to complete an evaluation of Larry's home environment; this evaluation became a part of the IEP-planning process.

The goal of the Special Needs Office is to educate your child in a regular classroom, where the support services are offered. These support services can be special materials or special assistance, which can be administered by an aide or a special educator. When your child is educated in his regular classroom, the process is termed mainstreaming.

When your child's disability warrants it, the Special Needs Office withdraws him from the general classroom and enrolls him in a special school. For example, Larry's Deafness was significant enough that his total learning environment needed to support his disability while allowing him access to the general curriculum, but he did it in an environment that has total support for the Deaf. So Larry enrolled in a full-time, out-of-district program, from which he received his high school diploma. In our case, recall that we lived in Marlboro, and Larry matriculated from TLC in Framingham. The town of Marlboro funded the cost of Larry's education. After that point, we dealt with the Special Needs education director, his staff in Marlboro, and Larry's teachers at TLC.

In the big picture, the majority of Special Needs students are educated in a regular classroom. For example, in Marlboro, when Larry attended school, there were 4,500 students in the school district. A thousand of these students had Special Needs, and approximately 10 or 12 of these students were Deaf.

Some students' disabilities can be serviced for a short period of time out of district, a year or two, but many return and function

effectively in the regular classroom, accessing the curriculum.

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5 WHAT IS THE PARENT'S ROLE IN AN EFFECTIVE IEP?

*"Education is the cornerstone for liberty."
~Eleanor Roosevelt*

Your role as a parent is most important in developing an effective IEP for your child. Here are seven steps that will assure your confidence level is high as you move through this process.

Step 1: Take an active role in developing the goals in your child's IEP.

It is your responsibility and your duty, as parents, to make yourselves as knowledgeable as possible about your child's disability. The more knowledgeable you are, the better able you are to advocate for and to articulate your child's needs. You really need to make it your business to understand the entire evaluation process for Special Needs services for your child.

There are many discreet learning disabilities that are not as obvious as Deafness; therefore, you will need to be diligent about identifying when your child is not reaching typical milestones, or if his pediatrician says things are not developing quite as quickly as they

should or on target. That is when you should be thinking about the possibility that there might be something that could be brought in to help support your child and help him better access the regular classroom.

When your child has been identified with a learning disability, you need to educate yourself as much as possible about that disability, all the different options available for access to the school curriculum, and then work with the Special Needs Office and your child's school to determine the best path for your child. This information should be detailed in writing in your child's IEP.

Many of you are caught off guard when you are told that your child has a disability. For us, it was our first experience with Deafness. Under IDEA Part D, the U.S. Department of Education funds at least one-parent training and information center in each state and most territories to provide you with the information you will need to advocate effectively for your child. Some centers may also provide a knowledgeable person to accompany you to IEP meetings to assist you in participating more fully in the process. The school must also take whatever action is necessary to ensure that you understand the proceedings of the IEP team meetings, including arranging for an interpreter for you, if you are Deaf, or if English is not your native language.

When your child has a distinct Special Need like Deafness or if the school discovers your child's disability, then it is easy and straightforward for your child to receive Special Needs services. However, if you discover your child's disability and you have your child tested to confirm your findings, sometimes it can be challenging to receive services. Your child's school and the Special Needs Office may want to do independent testing before they decide that your child qualifies for services. Request that your child's school provides you with a timeline for the independent testing the school wants to do, so that you will know how long the process will take. You must be persistent, and give the school and the Special Needs Office any information they request from you. It is a good idea to enlist your child's doctor(s) and teacher(s) to support you.

Step 2: Be prepared for the IEP meeting.

An IEP meeting is not to be confused with a Parent/Teacher conference in which you sit and listen as the teacher reports on your student's progress and performance. In order to fully participate in developing your child's IEP, you must be knowledgeable about your child's specific disabilities, their rights under federal and state law, and the policies and procedures of the local education agency.

You must remember that, as a parent, you are considered to be a full and equal member of the IEP team, along with the Special Needs Office and school personnel. Therefore, you should expect to be treated as an equal participant in all of the IEP meetings.

We highly recommend that there be no surprises for the IEP team on your behalf in the IEP meetings. Your working relationship with your child's educational team should help you resolve issues and have agreements on your child's educational needs before the IEP meeting.

Remember, as parents, you can bring other professionals (i.e., your child's psychologist, doctor or tutor) with you to the IEP meeting.

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Step 3: Develop a relationship with the department that funds your child's Special Needs education.

Usually your child's Special Needs Office, which is synonymous to an education funding organization, will schedule meetings periodically to discuss their plans, news and changes on how the department operates. Attend as many of these meetings as possible, and develop a relationship with the director, supervisor, and administrative assistant for your child's Special Needs Office. This relationship will foster better dialogue between you and the department and support you in making requests suited to your child's educational requirements. The more you are acquainted with the Special Needs Office staff, the more feasible it will be to discuss your child's needs and arrive at a solution.

When we lived in Marlboro, the Special Needs Office dealt with approximately 1,000 Special Needs students a year. Over the years, they worked with thousands of students to maintain a continuous record of student progress. To better facilitate this process, we made sure the Special Needs department knew Larry and us by name and that we were interested in Larry's educational progress. One tip that may prove effective here is when you communicate with the administrative assistant of the Special Needs Office, you should be as pleasant as possible. This makes it easier for you to get appointments with the director and have your paperwork processed in an expeditious manner, etc.

Some parents visit the Special Needs Office with a hostile attitude. We encourage you to always put your child's needs first and have a working relationship with the office. Be balanced in your approach, be proactive as much as possible and do not start the relationship with an aggressive tone. If you find it difficult to develop a cooperative, working relationship with the Special Needs Office, you may want to consider moving to another school district. If that is not possible, then seek an advocate or lawyer.

Step 4: Review your child's IEP before the annual IEP meetings.

We requested a copy of Larry's IEP a few days before the IEP meeting so we could review the IEP. Your child's teacher is usually very busy developing IEPs so you need to give the teacher early notice that you need the IEP for review. Having a relationship with your child's teacher and the funding, special education supervisor will help, because you will already know your child's level of education and his next level of education and services to be addressed in the IEP.

This step is extremely important. For our very first IEP meeting when Larry was four years old, we were new to the process, and we saw the IEP only on the day of the IEP meeting with the school. Many of the facts were inaccurate. Larry's teacher had written that he was behind in understanding English and American Sign Language, because we spoke a foreign language at home. That was untrue; the only language we know is English. The teacher assumed we spoke a different language because of our ethnicity and accents.

We challenged the plan and received a corrected IEP. Larry was placed in another teacher's class, where he made rapid progress. His new teacher understood that he was behind in communication, because he started his formal language development at four years old. The teacher employed expedited strategies in teaching him new information, which Larry mastered easily. After this incident, we always requested a copy of the IEP at least a week or a few days before the IEP meeting, so that there were no surprises. This way, we always had time to clarify questionable issues with the teacher(s) before the meeting.

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Step 5: Review and update your child's IEP during the interim reviews.

Interim reviews are IEP progress reports mandated by law and are issued approximately three or four times a year. The interim review times are excellent opportunities for you to communicate with your child's teacher(s). The IEP progress reports address the short-term goals in your child's IEP. They reveal how well your child is doing as far as what the IEP team agreed upon when they wrote the full-year IEP.

Usually the interim reviews are detailed in writing, and you are asked to review and sign them to indicate agreement. The IEP progress reports can be very daunting, with lots of pages of official-looking documentation. We recommend that you review these progress reports with your child's teacher(s) and make sure your child is progressing as expected in the full-year IEP goals. If your child is not progressing as expected, then in the interim review meetings, you should seek adjustments to the services your child receives for the remainder of the school year. For example, your child may need more one-on-one attention with his teacher(s) or tutor. In our experience, we had to work out these adjustments with Larry's school and teachers, not his Special Needs, education funding organization, because the organization was funding his school for him to access the curriculum as detailed in the IEP.

It is your responsibility to remain vigilant throughout the year. At the progress meetings during the year, discuss if your child is making the milestones that were described in the educational plan. Consider the following questions: Is your child on course to meet the goals that were set in the IEP for the year? If not, why? And what can the IEP team do from then until the end of the year to help meet those goals?

If you are finding that things are not progressing as you had anticipated, then it is your obligation as a parent to communicate with your child's school and the Special Needs Office to reconvene. Discuss your child's progress with your child's teachers and school

supervisor before the interim progress report, but make sure your concerns are addressed to your satisfaction before or at the progress report meetings. Please note that these meetings are an opportunity for you to meet with your child's teacher(s) to discuss your child's academic progress. The Special Needs Office is not involved in the progress report meeting.

If your child needs more services or different placement, the interim, progress-report opportunity is where you talk about your child's needs. It is the IEP team's decision, but you are a critical part of that team. You drive the changes.

Larry was very good at mathematics, and we had the IEP amended during the school year to provide mathematics tutoring during the summer for the next level of mathematics. We wanted Larry to have the opportunity to complete the mathematics courses that were in the curriculum for every student, hearing or Deaf, before he graduated from high school. Since we had a good relationship with our town's Special Needs Office and Larry's school, this was easily done and Larry had his mathematics teacher as a tutor during the summer. So if he was ready for Algebra, then that was the level of mathematics in his goals.

Here is an example where we should have been more proactive. In middle school, Larry was struggling with Reading and English. He had a literature class where the reading material was Shakespeare. We knew he was struggling with Reading and English, and this class was incredibly frustrating for him. At that point, we should have had a discussion with his teacher and the middle school supervisors to find a solution that met Larry's needs and have his IEP amended. Clearly, Shakespeare was not appropriate for Larry at that point.

Step 6: Have an active relationship with your child's teachers and school supervisors.

You need to have regular interactions with your child's principal, teachers and other school supervisors to understand what your child is being taught, how your child is progressing, what your child will be taught next, and understand your child's teachers' expectations.

As parents, you should remain balanced by being reasonable and practical on one hand, and, on the other hand, having high expectations for your child. We personally believe that you should err on the side of having high expectations for your child.

You cannot sit back and allow school personnel to do everything for you. Like you, they are busy, and if you do not pay attention, you will not notice that your child is not making as much progress as he should. Remain consistent about your child's success, have reasonable expectations and be proactive.

You have a responsibility to learn how to work with your child's school. Discover how school personnel views your role as parent. You know your child best, you know what you want for him, and hopefully, you and the school can work together.

An active relationship with your child's teachers will help you in the following ways:

1. You will be able to understand what is being stated in your child's IEP for measurable short term and annual goals.
2. You can have input regarding which educational needs will receive the most attention. For example, Larry made great progress in mathematics but needed extra attention in English.
3. Your child's teachers will realize that you are interested in your child's education, and they will make extra efforts on behalf of

your child.

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Step 7: Ensure that your child is getting access to the full-school curriculum.

When Larry was ten years old, he started playing soccer in the Marlboro town league. He quickly developed a passion for soccer and had the goal to play on the Marlboro junior varsity and varsity teams. Larry attended The Learning Center for the Deaf, a school outside of the Marlboro district, which did not have a soccer team. Larry vied for and received a position on the Marlboro High School team. Based on fortuitous discussions with Mr. John Tully, the Marlboro Director of Special Needs, we learned that Larry would be able to attend school in Framingham and play soccer in Marlboro. In our case, this was not added to the IEP, but the Special Needs Office did provide an interpreter for Larry when he played soccer in Marlboro. As a result of this blessing, Larry excelled at soccer and played for many hearing clubs in Massachusetts, including the Boston Eagles, a first-division club. In addition, Larry, a confident, well-known star, played for the US Men Soccer Team at the Deaf Olympics.

6 WHAT IS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL ROLE IN DEVELOPING HIS IEP?

*"When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is created in our life,
or in the life of another."*

~Helen Keller

Let us do a review. You learn your child needs Special Needs services as a current student or as a new student. Or your toddler needs Special Needs services and attends school on a part-time basis. Your child's teachers develop the written IEP statement, which is reviewed and agreed upon by your child's school district, Special Needs Office, and you, the parents.

The school district pays the school-tuition fees for your child to meet the agreed-upon goals detailed in the initial IEP and the annual IEPs for your child to access the school curriculum. It is the school's responsibility, one mandated by law, to provide regular progress reports that address the short-term goals in your child's IEP. The progress reports detail how well your child is doing as far as what the IEP team agreed upon when they wrote the full-year IEP.

Usually, the school does a good job to ensure that your child is meeting the goals in the IEP. If you believe that your child is not meeting the goals of the IEP, you should ask to be scheduled for a discussion with the school. If your child needs special services, such as a tutor, more one-on-one instruction with a teacher or a teacher's aide, school personnel is responsible for providing your child with this service because the school is being paid tuition for services detailed in the IEP. When school personnel enroll your child, they vow to you and to the school district that they can meet your child's educational needs.

Sometimes schools are not interested in dealing with parents on a one-on-one level. We recommend that you assure your child's teacher(s) that you know your child best. Be clear. Communicate that you understand your child's needs and that you want to work with teachers for your child's progress.

Many states, such as Massachusetts, offer programs such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). This program mandates that every child should be able to reach higher standards. The program's goals have been an awakening for private schools, for the teachers for more handicapped children, whether it be physically or intellectually. There are expectations for these kids to excel as well and to do the best they can do.

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7 A CHAT WITH MR. JOHN TULLY, RETIRED DIRECTOR OF PUPIL SERVICES

Raz Stephen:

What kind of encouragement do you want to give fathers and mothers about going through the IEP process? When we went through the process, sometimes it was difficult because Alex and I worked full time, and we traveled. Through it all, I realized we made Larry and the process a priority. Because it was a priority, we had the energy to do it, and in the end, we received the reward. What can we do to encourage other parents?

John Tully:

Parents should stay involved and really understand that they have a specific role in their child's education. Larry is very fortunate to have had both you and Alex as his parents.

Raz:

Yes, both father and mother.

John:

Yes. I talked to Alex earlier, and he seemed kind of surprised that the average divorce rate for the general population is 50% and that divorced parents head 80% of families with Special Needs children. This makes it very difficult for the children as well as the families.

There's a lot of stress, obviously, with having a Special Needs child, and the need for parents to work together for the child is critical. What can they do? Part of it is to carry over the lessons of the day, helping the kids with their homework, helping the kids with understanding the big picture, being available to support them, and telling the child that he is doing a good job. It's the involvement. Almost over involvement is critical for a child's success, for maximizing his growth.

Raz:

That's true—over involvement.

John:

Fathers need to be more involved in their child's life. Involvement is not just about getting a kid to a soccer game on Saturday or Sunday. It's the practices, the homework, the prep, and a lot of "Att'a boy!" However that kind of encouragement is communicated is essential. It's the friendships—help foster those. The kids with disabilities have a harder time; they don't live as close to the center of activity. They just don't go out in the neighborhood necessarily and have the praise of the kids next door, so I think it's up to you as parents to provide that for them. More self-esteem is key.

8 A MOTHER'S THOUGHTS AND A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

*"Being a parent of a Special Needs child is tough sometimes but is rewarding all
the time."*

~Raz Stephen

A Mother's Thoughts

When we first discovered Larry was profoundly Deaf in both ears, Alex and I were in our early twenties. The news was overwhelming; it was our first experience with Deafness. As a young couple, we excitedly mapped out our family's future with great ideas and plans, but we never expected to receive the news that our firstborn was Deaf. No, that was not in our plans. The news took us by surprise; so much so, our first reaction was disbelief. We were sad, and we cried. We asked ourselves, "How are we going to deal with this? Where are we supposed to start?" We were frightened of the uncertainties ahead.

It took us some time to deal with the sadness and get over the “What if?” and the “Who to blame?” scenarios. As we floundered in the pit of feeling sorry for ourselves, we discovered that action can be a lifeline out of despair. We became proactive and learned more about Deafness and met Deaf adults leading productive, normal lives. This helped us tremendously, as we began to realize that Larry could lead a normal life, too. Over the years, we learned to say to ourselves in difficult times, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” This attitude instantly snaps us out of self-pity and catapults us into action.

Alex and I are both independent spirits, and we wanted the same for our children. We have found that education is a key to independence. One of the tools to giving our son access to the school curriculum was an effective IEP. We found that the IEP process is complicated and intimidating.

For our child to have the best education possible, however, we learned to navigate the IEP process. This is why we wrote this book so you can find your way through the maze, step by step. Because you must be the primary advocate for your child, the sooner you start the better. You must always know who the key players are and their responsibilities in the IEP process. They should have the right information at the right time. You are responsible for your child’s IEP from detection to resolution. The reason for this is that your child’s teachers and Special Needs services department are frequently too busy to pay attention to every requirement that might benefit your child.

On many occasions, I have found that mothers take charge of dealing with their child’s education and the IEP process. I believe that we should ask for help when we feel we need it, especially from our spouse or other family members. The IEP process is very manageable when everyone involved works as a team.

If you are beginning the journey to obtain Special Needs services for your child or you are facing obstacles on the journey, I sincerely encourage you to plow along. As your child makes progress and you see his improvements and accomplishments, you will be proud and

happy. I promise you that your life will be interesting and even rewarding. On the Special Needs journey, you will meet people who are motivated to serve. For example, we met Special Needs services staff in Marlboro who were concerned about Special Needs students. They did everything possible to fulfill the child's needs. Many of them frequently excelled the call of duty. Like us, you will work with teachers and caregivers who do their jobs with joy and unselfish service, as they connect with your child and support his progress. You will meet parents and families willing to share their experience and success. Unfailingly, Alex and I received motivation and hope each time we took the time to meet, understand, befriend, and accept guidance from Deaf adults.

Please join our community at www.deafparenting.com for more information and discussions with other parents.

A Father's Perspective

"Play the cards that life deals you; the rewards will astound you."

~Alex Stephen

When the doctor in Trinidad told Raz and me that our one-year-old son, Larry, was Deaf, we were devastated. As young parents, we had no idea how we were going to handle this situation. Kevin Costner, the famous actor, said, "When defining moments come along, either you define the moment or the moment defines you." That was a defining moment in our lives. Raz and I looked at each other, knowing in our hearts that we would do our best for Larry. As his father, I felt helpless, fearful, and anxious. With tears in my eyes and courage in my heart, I looked at my family and made a commitment to be the best I could be. As I looked at my giggling baby, who had no clue what his future held, I silently said, "He needs me now more than ever."

This type of news hits you like a curve ball. Facing it, you ask yourself, "What am I going to do about it?" William Ward said, "Adversity causes some men to break, and others to break records." We had to take charge of the situation head on. As parents, Raz and I had to acknowledge and accept the challenges. We made a commitment, did our research, networked, planned, and then took action. We started early, and that decision served us well. After three years of research, attending workshops, gathering information, and saving money, we made a life-altering decision to leave Trinidad and migrate to the USA, to afford our child an education and an opportunity to become a successful and independent adult.

Friends and relatives said we were crazy to move for our son's welfare. Their discouraging comments and our increasing responsibilities and challenges weighed heavily on my shoulders and heart. In addition, there were good-intentioned people, who believed I shouldn't give up my current life for my son. Before we left the island, our daughter, Charisma, was born, and on Saturday, January 8, 1983, a friend said to me, "You will not make it with two kids, one

being Deaf, you and your wife in school full time, no extended family, and no full-time jobs in a foreign country with a cold climate. I will pick you up here next Saturday." Despite the naysayers, I drew on my faith and commitment to my family to do the right thing.

In 1983, when Larry started his education, we had no idea what an IEP was. The first time we saw one, we were in a meeting at Larry's elementary school. Imagine our surprise when we discovered inaccuracies and false assumptions in the IEP. To make matters worse, Larry's teacher said he did not fit the program. In a diplomatic manner, Raz and I pointed out the IEP's inaccuracies and assumptions. The school officials saw the hurt and disappointment in our faces. They apologized and later transferred Larry to another teacher's class, where he blossomed. That semester, Larry's first time receiving formal, communication skills at four and a half years old, he received four of seven awards at the school. His new teacher said he was bright and talented. I have always maintained that I will not trade him for the world. As parents, Raz and I realized that we had to be our child's advocate, and to better support our son, we learned as we went and never gave up.

For parents, especially fathers, having a special needs child is challenging. You have to pay more attention, be more patient and spend more time with your special needs child. From my experience, this bonding time is invaluable. Over time, you will find the rewards enormously gratifying. Do not run from what can be the best thing to happen to you.

When Larry was eleven, he decided to concentrate on becoming a professional soccer player to the neglect of his school work. We had a two-hour conversation, in which I explained to him that his mother and I supported his passion for soccer, but his education should be equally important. I asked him to consider possible injury, being cut from the team, losing his passion for the sport or battling the disadvantage of being a Deaf player. I reminded him of the sacrifices and risks his mother and I took so he could become an independent, successful adult. Crying, Larry said he understood, and from that day onward, he made education a top priority. Because I wanted him to follow his passion and excel in school, I knew it was my job to inform

him of the possible consequences of his choices. Afterwards, Larry's school supervisor wanted to know how he had his life planned so well. I told her about our conversation, and later, upon graduation, Larry received Valedictorian and the first award for being the most promising student to be a leader in the Deaf community.

As an athlete, Larry was very confident that he was a great soccer player. He trained diligently, ate well, and practiced frequently. Although Larry knew he was different, he had excellent skills despite his hearing loss, as his coaches recognized. And as his father, I always pointed out his strengths and areas of improvement, because communication is very important between parent and child.

After Larry's soccer team won its league in the town soccer program, the next season an All-Star team was formed. Although Larry was one of the top three players on the team, he was overlooked for the All-Star team. For two weeks, Raz and I made phone calls, showed up at officials' offices unannounced, and threatened legal action to get Larry on the All-Star team, where parents, previous coaches, and his mother and I thought he belonged. But the person who formed the All-Star team thought differently.

The aggravation of sleepless nights, time from work, visiting the superintendent of schools, contacting Larry's former coaches, and talking to our attorney---everything was worth it. I stuck to my commitment to support Larry, because one person's agenda should not derail your child's dreams.

Once Larry made the team and, in his first game, went in as a substitute, he scored two goals in six minutes. The meritorious coach of the team was also the Marlboro High School boys' varsity soccer coach. He invited Larry to be a member of the Marlboro High School varsity team. Being an advocate for Larry in this situation, the coach was instrumental in Larry becoming a viable member of the varsity team in Marlboro, although he attended The Learning Center in Framingham. He also got recruited to play club soccer. Larry's soccer dreams were coming true. He played at California State University Northridge (CSUN) and for the USA Deaf Men Soccer Olympics team in Italy. You can be an advocate by listening to your

child, making sure he receives what he deserves, and not permitting him to be sidelined due to his special needs. Be your child's manager and coach. It can open doors and bolster your child's confidence.

When Larry was a boy, we shared many fun times together. I interpreted when he played basketball, at most of his varsity and club soccer games. I attended his practices and soccer camps. As a family, we traveled to Wales, when he played for his club, and Italy, when he represented the USA Deaf Men Olympics soccer team. It was a pleasure watching him play in California for CSUN. His Boston Eagles Club coach, Brian Ainscough, said, "Although Larry was Deaf, he was the only player who listened to me." Larry always followed his passion. Raz and I discussed his options with him and empowered him to make his decisions. Empower your child to excel in what he loves. You will develop a special bond and trust as you spend time together.

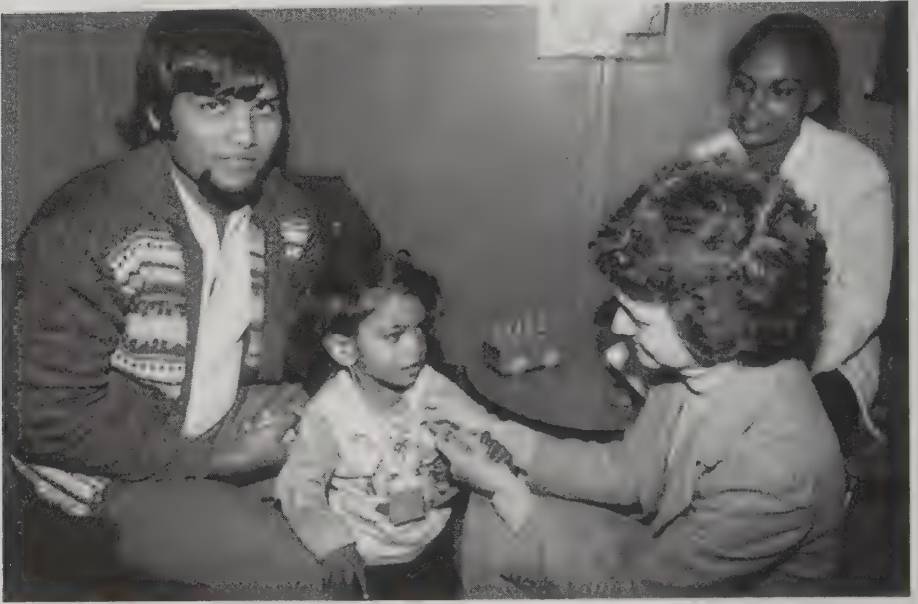
"To a child, Love is spelt T.I.M.E."

~ Unknown

Spend quality time with your child whenever you have the opportunity. The rewards and gratification will be unimaginable. When Larry left for CSUN on the West Coast, there was a void in my life. We had spent 17 years together, and now my son and best friend was no longer with me. The memories we created are priceless. Larry got his undergraduate degree from CSUN. He and his wife, Amrit, a Deaf, Singapore native, received their Masters at McDaniel College in Maryland. Except for the World Cup, Larry played at all levels of soccer.

Today, a college professor, Larry Stephen is the father of a hearing daughter, Raveena. A homeowner, he is an internationally active member of the Deaf community. Every day I experience joy, pride, and gratitude to witness where Larry is in his life. I can safely say by the grace of God he is an independent and successful adult. I am grateful that I chose to be a committed father, and I will not trade him for the world. In reflection, I realize now that I needed him more than ever!

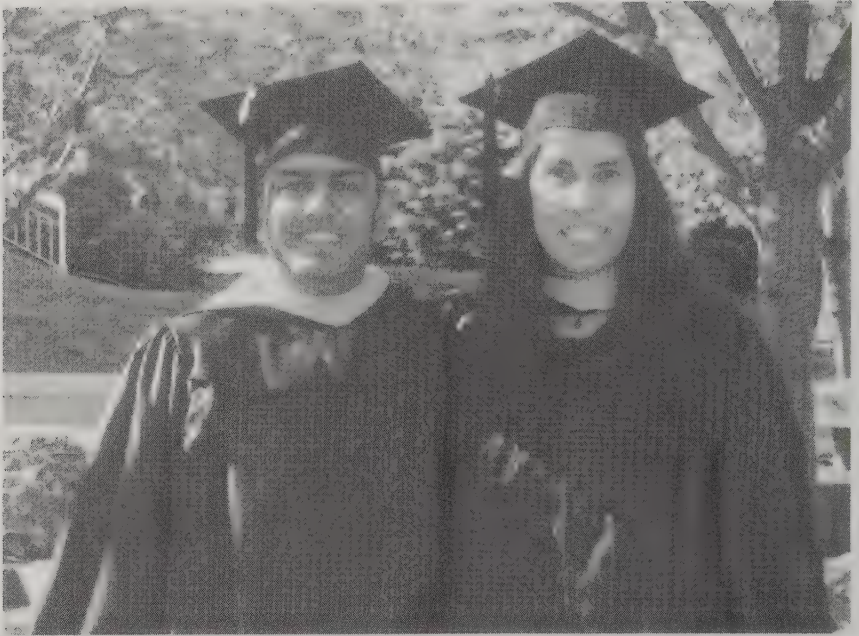
9 A PHOTO GALLERY OF LARRY'S JOURNEY



In November 1980, Larry received his first hearing aid in Mercy Hospital in Chicago.



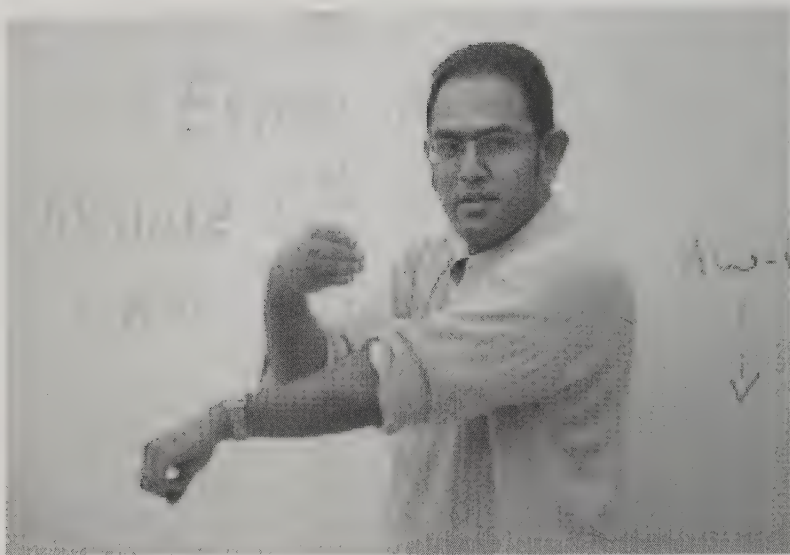
In June 1996, Larry received his high school diploma from The Learning Center for the Deaf.



In May 2005, Larry and his wife Amrit graduated with Masters from McDaniel College in Maryland.



Larry and Amrit celebrate their house closing in October 2009.



In 2013, Larry was teaching at Northern Essex Community College in MA.



In August 2012, Larry, Amrit and their daughter Raveena smile for a family Legacy picture.

10 CONCLUSION/IEP GOALS MADE EASY ACTION GUIDE

Thank you for reading this book if you have gotten this far. We appreciate you for taking this journey to unraveling the mystery in the IEP process. Every child should have the opportunity to receive the best education possible from kindergarten to high school and beyond. It is our sincere hope that this book serves as your resource to swing wide the doors to confidence and independence for the Special Needs child and his parents.

Please join our community at www.deafparenting.com for more information and discussions with other parents.

What follows in this conclusion are **Sample Elements in an IEP** and two tools, an **IEP Contacts List with Sample Contacts** and an **Important IEP Dates for School Year with Sample Events**. An **Action Guide with 20 practical actions you can begin implementing today** is also included.

Sample Elements in an IEP

1. Student's Information

- 1) Name
- 2) Date of birth
- 3) Parents/Guardian's name
- 4) Address
- 5) Parents/Guardian's phone number
- 6) Student's present school
- 7) Grade
- 8) Date of IEP meeting
- 9) Date of Eligibility
- 10) IEP review dates
- 11) Child's Primary Language

2. Student's Performance Profile

- 1) Where child lives
- 2) Siblings; number of brothers and sisters
- 3) Child's strengths
- 4) Child's needs
- 5) Present level of performance
- 6) Testing and evaluation results

3. Program Eligibility

- 1) Eligible or not eligible
- 2) Area(s) of disability
- 3) Rationale for eligibility

4. List of special instructions

- 1) Consideration, for example, does the student require one-on-one instruction in a particular area.

5. Related services

- 1) Name of service, for example, speech therapy
- 2) Provider
- 3) Hours per week
- 4) Location

6. Special education placement

- 1) General education classroom: duration in hours, and any assistance

- 2) Self-contained class
- 3) Special day school
- 4) Rationale for placement in setting other than general education class

7. Special services

- 1) Physical education, for example, adaptive
- 2) Transportation
- 3) Is student provided an opportunity to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities with non-disabled peers? What supports are necessary?

8. Transition services

9. Progress reports

- 1) Method, for example, written
- 2) Frequency, for example, every 8 weeks.

10. IEP development team

- 1) Name
- 2) Signature
- 3) Position/Title, for example, parent/guardian, teacher, Special Needs Office director, school department supervisor and principal.

11. Annual Goals and Milestones

- 1) Area
- 2) Annual Goal
- 3) Milestone Goals
- 4) Provider
- 5) Evaluation Method
- 6) Initiation Date
- 7) Check Date
- 8) Mastery Date

IEP Contacts List with Sample Contacts

Organization	Name	Role	Phone Number	Email Address
Child's School	Janice Jones	Teacher	508-555-5555	jjones@school.org
Child's School	Nancy Miller	Elementary School Supervisor	508-555-7777	nmiller@school.org
Child's School	Mary Smith	Principal	617-333-333	msmith@school.org
Child's School	John Brown	Occupational Therapist	617-222-2222	jbrown@school.org
Child's School	Wendy Su	Academic Area Specialist	617-666-6666	wsu@school.org
Special Needs Services Dept	John Smith	Director	617-555-5555	jsmith@snsd.org
Special Needs Services Dept	Amy Cole	Administrative Assistant	978-555-5555	acole@snsd.org
My child's doctor	Dr. Kim Powers	Pediatrician	212-555-5555	kpowers@doctors.com

Important IEP Dates for School Year with Sample Events

Date	Event	With Whom	My To Dos
October	Discuss my child's progress	Teacher	List my questions and review with Teacher
November	Request Copy of Interim IEP	Teacher	List my questions and review with Teacher
February	Discuss my child's progress	Teacher	List my questions and review with Teacher
March	Schedule any needed testing	Pediatrician	List my questions and review with Pediatrician
March	Discuss changes in services recommended by pediatrician	Teacher and Elementary School Supervisor	Discuss changes for next school year IEP
March	Request Copy of Interim IEP	Teacher	List my questions and review with Teacher
April	Attend Special Needs Services Dept or school district update services meeting	Director of Special Needs Services Dept	List my follow up actions
May	Request Copy of next school year IEP	Teacher	Review IEP for agreed on changes
June	Next Year's IEP Meeting	IEP Team	Discuss and sign IEP

IEP Goals Made Easy Action Guide

1. Know your child's IEP team members. Write their names, their telephone numbers, their e-mail addresses, and their responsibilities in the space below. Record that information in your IEP Contacts List (sample list included in **IEP Goals Made Easy**).

2. Make a list of 3 things you can do to get to know the IEP team members. For example, schedule a visit to the Special Needs Office, meet the staff, and discuss with the director or supervisor his method for working with newly identified students and their parents.

3. There are six stages in the IEP process: **Detection, Evaluation, Creation, Review, Renewal** and **Completion**. To make the best decisions for your child and participate in the effective planning of his educational program, you should become very familiar with each stage. In what stage is your child's current IEP? What is your role in this stage? How can you prepare for the next stage? Write your responses in the space below.

4. When your child is identified as having a disability, your feelings are huge, and the news can be incredibly overwhelming. Please remember: do not be afraid or ashamed to accept or to ask for help. Everyone is different, everyone is unique, and you must do everything you can to make sure your child is performing at his highest potential.

You can meet other families with a Special Needs child.

You can get to know adults who have the same or similar disability.

You can share your feelings with your spouse and family, and discuss how everyone can help. For example, some can research, while others network.

Write 3 actions your family will take.

5. When is your next IEP meeting? What are the Interim IEP review dates? Record that information on your Important IEP Dates List or on the school calendar (sample list included in **IEP Goals Made Easy**).

6. The more knowledgeable you are, the better able you are to advocate for and to articulate your child's needs. You really need to make it your business to understand the entire evaluation process for Special Needs services for your child.

Write 3 actions you can take to understand the evaluation process for your child's school district. What is the Special Needs Office evaluation process? What does your child's school view as its role in the evaluation process?

How does the school view your role as parents?

7. When your child has been identified with a learning disability, you need to educate yourself as much as possible about the disability, all the different options available for access to the school curriculum, and then work with the Special Needs Office and your child's school to determine the best path for your child.

Write 3 things you can do to understand the different options for your child. For example, you can speak to other families who have experienced or are experiencing the same situation.

8. Many of you are caught off guard when you are told that your child has a disability. For us, it was our first experience with Deafness. Under IDEA Part D, the U. S. Department of Education funds at least one-parent training and information center in each state and most territories to provide you with the information you will need to advocate effectively for your child. Locate the parent training and information center in your state.

Write 3 helpful things that you found on their website or by contacting them.

9. If you discover your child's disability and you have your child tested to confirm your findings, sometimes it can be challenging to receive services. Your child's school and the Special Needs Office may want to do independent testing before they decide that your child qualifies for services.

Write 3 actions you can take to facilitate the process for your child to receive services.

10. Write the questions that you most want answered in the IEP meeting. Having your questions already written will increase your comfort level before the meeting. Which questions can be addressed before the IEP meeting?

11. Request a copy of your child's IEP a few days before the IEP meeting so you can review the IEP.

Write a list of all your questions. Discuss your questions with your child's teacher(s) before the IEP meeting.

12. The interim IEP review times are excellent opportunities for you to communicate with your child's teacher(s). The IEP progress reports

address the short-term goals in your child's IEP.

Write a list of all your questions. Discuss your questions with your child's teacher(s).

13. If your child is making the milestones that were described in the IEP, consider the following questions: Is your child on course to meet the goals that were set in the IEP for the year? If not, why? And what can the IEP team do from then until the end of the year to help meet those goals?

Write a list of all your questions. Discuss your questions with your child's teacher(s).

14. You cannot sit back and allow school personnel to do everything for you. Like you, they are busy, and if you do not pay attention, you will not know that your child is not making as much progress as he should. Remain consistent about your child's success, have reasonable expectations and be proactive.

Write 3 things you are already doing with your child's school for your child's progress. Is there one more thing you could do?

15. What are your thoughts as a parent on the IEP process? What would

you like to share with other parents? Your spouse? Write your thoughts in the space provided below.

16. Does your child have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities with non-disabled peers? Is your child participating in sports or music or other activities? What supports are necessary for him to participate?

17. Alex and I are both independent spirits, and we wanted the same for our children. We have found that education is a key to independence. What are your dreams and goals for your child?

Write 3 of your dreams and goals in the space provided below.

18. On many occasions, I have found that mothers take charge of dealing with their child's education and the IEP process. I believe that we should ask for help when we feel we need it, especially from our spouse or other family members. The IEP process is very manageable when everyone involved works as a team. Are you taking the most responsibility for your child's education? Think about how you feel about your responsibilities? Can you ask for or accept help from your spouse or family members?

In the space provided below, write 3 of your feelings about your

responsibilities for your child's education? What can you do to involve your spouse?

19. Parents, especially fathers, make a commitment to support and be there for your Special Needs child. He needs you.

Identify 3 ways you can commit and support your child on this journey.

20. Discover your child's passions. In Larry's case, he loved soccer. We supported him, and he set goals at an early age. Goal-setting encouraged him to live a healthy, disciplined lifestyle, and the experience increased his self-esteem and confidence. That discipline transferred to his school work.

Write 3 ways you can help your child find his passion and 3 ways you can support him.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alex Stephen

Alex is the father of Larry and Charisma Stephen. He is the grandfather of Raveena Stephen. Alex is an author, speaker and transformation/lifestyle coach. Passionate about transforming lives around the globe by helping people identify and live their life's purpose, he uses his own life as an example of how to live your purpose and automatically create a legacy for your loved ones. A Howard University honor graduate and a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Alex built a distinguished, 20-year career in business finance where he held titles such as Corporate Loan Officer and Vice President/Director.

Raz Stephen

Raz is the mother of Larry and Charisma Stephen. She is the grandmother of Raveena Stephen. Raz is an author, speaker and transformation/lifestyle coach, who joins her husband in touching lives and changing destinies of those who hear and read the awe-inspiring story of their life journey. The dynamic mother, grandmother and businesswoman holds a managerial position in a major software company. Raz is a Howard University honor graduate with a Bachelor's in Math and Computer Science and a Master's in Computer Science.

Raz Stephen joins the Stephen Family (her husband Alex and children, Larry and Charisma) in authoring **Courage in our Hearts ~ A Family's Love Story** and **Discover Your Inner Treasure ~ Inspired by: Courage in our Hearts (An Action Guide)**.

LINKS AND CONTACTS

Please join our community at www.deafparenting.com for free reports and discussions with other parents.

The Stephen Family can also be reached via the following links and contacts:

HYPERLINK <http://www.LifeTransformingTreasures.com>
www.LifeTransformingTreasures.com

Free Personal Development Products www.pdpowerpack.com
www.NextLevelRiches.com ~ A home-study training system with video, audio, PDF and worksheets

Free Strategy Session www.meetwithalex.com

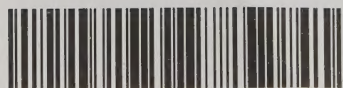
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This must-read book is based on the authors' experience in navigating the development of effective IEPs for their son, who is now an independent and successful adult.



ISBN 9780991079735



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P8-BEZ-487